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# A study of Francis Thompson's Hound of heaven

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# A STUDY OF FRANCIS THOMPSON'S HOUND OF HEAVEN

BY

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SIXTH EDITION



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NEW YORK  
JOHN LANE COMPANY

MCMXIV

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**JOSEPH F. HANSELMAN, S.J.**

Provincial, Maryland-New York

**Nihil Obstat.**

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Archbishop of New York

VERBUM

*New York, July 20th, 1912*

VERBUM

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Printed, July 20, 1912..... 300 copies  
Reprinted, August, 1912.....1,000 copies  
Reprinted, September, 1912....1,000 copies  
Reprinted, December, 1912.....2,000 copies  
Reprinted, April, 1913.....3,000 copies  
Reprinted, January, 1914.....2,000 copies

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A STUDY  
OF  
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HOUND OF HEAVEN

BY REV. J. F. X. O'CONOR, S.J.

---

This great poem, strange to say, is comparatively little known. It is the sweetest, deepest, strongest song ever written in the English tongue.

Among some of the great odes are "Alexander's Feast," Dryden, "Ode on the Nativity," Milton, "Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth. To say Thompson's poem is one of the great odes is to place it unranked among them. In my judgment it is greater.

I do not hesitate to say with the *Bookman* that "the Hound of Heaven seems to us, on the whole, the most wonderful lyric in the language. It fingers all the stops of the spirit . . . but under all, the still sad music of humanity," and with the *Times*, that "people will still be learning it by heart two hundred years hence, for it has about it the unique thing that makes for immortality. It is the return of the nineteenth century to Thomas à Kempis."

With the *Spectator*, I ask, "is there any religious poem carrying so much of the passion of penitence—an ode in

the manner of Crashaw, and in the comparison, it more than holds its own."

With Coventry Patmore I marvel at the "profound thoughts and far-fetched splendor of imagery, qualities which ought to place him in the permanent ranks of fame," while even Burne-Jones cries out "Since Gabriel's Blessed Damosel no mystical words have so touched me as the Hound of Heaven."

And may we not add the words of G. K. Chesterton, "with Francis Thompson we lose the greatest poetic energy since Browning. In his poetry as in the poetry of the universe, you can work infinitely out and out, but yet infinitely in and in. These two infinities are the mark of a great poet, and he was a great poet."

"The great poetry of it (The Hound of Heaven) transcended in itself and in its influence all conventions," says Wilfrid Meynell, "so that it won the love of a Catholic Mystic like Coventry Patmore; was included by Canon Beeching in his *Lyra Sacra* among its older high compeers; and gave new heart to quite another manner of man, Edward Burne-Jones."

It would be difficult to find another poem in the language that gives such food for thought, so satisfying, so new, that can be read and reread, and always with a relish and a discovery of a new application, or the glimmer of an unseen light. In many poems, one reading suffices, and the mind is sated, for the whole depth is plummeted and all is revealed in a single view. It is not so in this poem. There is a depth that can be sounded, and deeper depths are still there. The vision takes in the view, but other details arise that charm, or surprise, or startle, or evoke admiration at the spiritual insight into the workings of the soul. It gives great and wide range of thought within a small compass, and a deep

knowledge of the human soul, of the meanings of life, of the soul's relation to God and of other beings not God, and of the hold of God's love upon the soul in spite of its fleeing from Him to the creatures of His hand.

It is happiness the human soul is ever yearning for. It never ceases its quest for happiness. Night and day, year after year, it is grasping after happiness. The weary days of labor are borne to gain the wealth with which it thinks it may buy happiness. The days of suffering and pain are spent in watching and waiting for the agony to pass, that happiness may come. It looks for it in every creature, in the earth, in the sea, in the air. The soul asks all these things—wherein is your happiness—and the answer of earth, air, sea is "He made us." "We are for Him, for His glory." So the soul is looking for happiness, and in all these things it will not find happiness. It will find happiness only in God. And yet instead of seeking it in God, it turns away from Him and seeks it in the creature, something that is not God. And God is ever seeking that soul which is running away from Him. Wherever it runs, the sound of those feet, following ever after, is heard, and a voice, stronger than the beat—

But with unhurrying chase,  
And imperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy  
They beat—and a Voice beats  
More instant than the feet,  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

And this thought of the creature fleeing from God, and ever pursued by His love, is most beautifully expressed in the poem of Francis Thompson, the great Catholic poet. He seems to sing in verse, the thought of St. Ignatius in

the spiritual exercises,—the thought of St. Paul in the tender, insistent love of Christ for the soul, and the yearning of Christ for the love of that soul which ever runs after creatures, till the love of Christ awakens in it a love of its God, which dims and deadens all love of creatures except through love for Him. This was the love of St. Paul, of St. Ignatius, of St. Stanislaus, of St. Francis of Assisi, of St. Clare, of St. Theresa.

## **THE HOUND OF HEAVEN.**

The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract at once, rather the reverse. But when one reads the poem this strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and imperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit

## FRANCIS THOMPSON.

Francis Thompson was born at Preston in 1859, the son of a physician. After seven years at Ushaw, he went to Queens College to qualify for his father's profession. He came to London ill and in great poverty, in reality starving, and was saved by the act of one whom he has immortalized:

"She passed—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing,  
And of her own scant pittance did she give  
That I might eat and live:  
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive."

He died in the hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth, in St. John's Wood, at the age of forty-eight, on November 13, 1907. His works are: *Poems*, *Sister Songs*, *New Poems*, *Selected Poems*, *The Hound of Heaven*.

In prose he has written "*Shelly*," *Health and Holiness*, and "*The Life of St. Ignatius Loyola*." The last named is edited, with notes, by J. H. Pollen, S.J.

"History will certainly be busy with this remarkable man's life," writes Alice Meynell, "as well as with his work; and this record will serve in the future, being at any rate, strictly true. As to the fate of his poetry in the judgment of his country, I have no misgivings. For no reactions of taste, no vicissitude of language, no change in the prevalent fashions of the art, no altering sense of the music of verse, can lessen the height or diminish the greatness of this poet's thought, or undo his experience, or unlive the life of this elect soul, or efface its passion. There is a call to our time from the noble seventeenth century; and this purely English poet cried "*Adsum*" to the resounding summons:

Come, and come strong  
To the conspiracy of our spacious song.

# The Hound of Heaven

---

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes, I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat—and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet—  
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,  
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,  
Trellised with interwining charities;  
(For, though I knew His love Who followèd,  
Yet was I sore adread  
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.)  
But, if one little casement parted wide,  
The gust of His approach would clash it to.  
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.

Across the margent of the world I fled,  
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,  
Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;  
Fretted to dulcet jars  
And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.  
I said to dawn: Be sudden; to eve: Be soon—  
With thy young skyey blossoms heap me over  
From this tremendous Lover!  
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!  
I tempted all His servitors, but to find  
My own betrayal in their constancy,  
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,  
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.  
To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;  
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.  
But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,  
The long savannahs of the blue;  
Or whether, Thunder-driven,  
They clangèd His chariot 'thwart a heaven,  
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their  
feet:—  
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.  
Still with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
Came on the following Feet,  
And a Voice above their beat—  
“Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.”

I sought no more that after which I strayed  
In face of man or maid;  
But still within the little children's eyes  
Seems something, something that replies,  
They at least are for me, surely for me!

I turned me to them very wistfully;  
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair  
    With dawning answers there,  
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair

"Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share  
With me" (said I) "your delicate fellowship;

    Let me greet you lip to lip,  
    Let me twine with you caresses,

        Wantoning

    With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,  
    Banqueting

    With her in her wind-walled palace,  
    Underneath her azured daïs,

    Quaffing, as your taintless way is,  
    From a chalice

Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring."

    So it was done:

*I* in their delicate fellowship was one—  
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.

*I* knew all the swift importings  
    On the wilful face of skies;

*I* knew how the clouds arise,  
    Spumed of the wild sea-snortings;

    All that's born or dies

    Rose and drooped with; made them shapers  
Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine—

    With them joyed and was bereaven.

*I* was heavy with the even,

    When she lit her glimmering tapers  
    Round the day's dead sanctities.

*I* laughed in the morning's eyes.

*I* triumphed and *I* saddened with all weather,  
    Heaven and *I* wept together,

And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;  
 Against the red throb of its sunset-heart  
     I laid my own to beat,  
     And share commingling heat;  
 But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.  
 In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek.  
 For ah! we know not what each other says,  
     These things and I; in sound *I* speak—  
*Their* sound is but their stir, *they* speak by silences.  
 Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;  
     Let her, if she would owe me,  
 Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me  
     The breasts o' her tenderness:  
 Never did any milk of hers once bless  
     My thirsting mouth.  
     Nigh and nigh draws the chase,  
     With unperturbèd pace,  
     Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
     And past those noisèd Feet  
     A Voice comes yet more fleet—  
     "Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me."  
 Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!  
 My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,  
     And smitten me to my knee;  
     I am defenceless utterly.  
     I slept, methinks, and woke;  
 And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.  
 In the rash lustihead of my young powers,  
     I shook the pillaring hours  
 And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,  
 I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—  
 My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.  
 My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,  
 Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

Yea, faileth now even dream  
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;

Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist  
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,  
Are yielding; cords of all too weak account  
For earth, with heavy griefs so overplussed.

Ah! is Thy love indeed  
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,  
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?

Ah! must—  
Designer infinite!—

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn  
with it?

My freshness spent its wavering shower i'the dust;  
And now my heart is as a broken fount,  
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate spilt down ever  
From the dank thoughts that shiver  
Upon the sighful branches of my mind.

Such is; what is to be?

The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?  
I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;  
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of Eternity:  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again;  
But not ere him who summoneth  
I first have seen, enwound

With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned;  
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.  
Whether man's heart or life it be which yields  
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest fields  
Be dunged with rotten death?

Now of that long pursuit  
Comes on at hand the bruit;  
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:  
"And is thy earth so marred,  
Shattered in shard on shard?  
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!  
Strange, piteous, futile thing!  
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?  
Seeing none but I make much of naught" (He said),  
"And human love needs human meriting:  
How hast thou merited—  
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?  
Alack, thou knowest not  
How little worthy of any love thou art!  
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
Save Me, save only Me?

*his own  
body*

All which I took from thee I did but take,  
Not for thy harms,  
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come."

Halts by me that footfall:  
Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

## THE HOUND OF HEAVEN.

### INTERPRETATION.

The poet begins with the idea of the soul fleeing from God, "I fled Him down the arches of the years," and how it strives to hide from Him in sorrow and joy, "in the mist of tears and under running laughter." Nor can it escape either in hope or fear from those feet "that follow after" "up vistaed hopes" and "adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears." For those feet ever follow after and a voice beats "more instant than the feet" "with unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace, majestic instancy."

"All things betray thee who betrayest me."

And when it came to plead for the love of other hearts, "by many a hearted casement," although it knew His love, yet it feared lest having him, it must have naught beside.

The human heart is not generous enough to give up all, and be satisfied with the love of God. It wishes other things besides God, and because God will have no other love in His place, it fears the love of God which demands this sacrifice, and it sacrifices God instead. But He is not satisfied with this. The creature must love Him. So when the "casement is parted wide" the "gust of His approach would clash it to."—

The soul is in fear of Him. It flees, but love pursues after fear. And though it flee to the stars across the world, to the moon, love is there still pursuing. At dawn and at eve it strives to hide, it calls upon the sky to drop its veil lest He see.

It tries to tempt God's creatures, but finds them constant, and itself betrayed. To everything swift it turns to evade the Divine pursuer, to the wind of the prairie, or to the thunder-driven winds that sweep the heavens mid thunder and lightning, but its fear cannot evade the swift following of love. Its search is vain in the face of man or maid, and it turns to the children, thinking "they at least are for me, surely for me," again to be undeceived. They answer not, for their angel takes them away. Nature's children will guard their fellowship, playing with the tresses of Mother Earth, in her palace with walls of wind and her blue dais of the heavens, drinking from a chalice out of the day-spring. It learned the secrets of Nature, the changes in the sky and the meaning thereof, the origin of the clouds from the foam of the sea, the causes of life and death, and made these tell his moods of lamentation or divine exaltation, companions of joy or sorrow. It was heavy with the evening, and radiant with laughter in the morning, and glad in bright and sad in stormy weather. It wept with nature and throbbed in unison with its sunset heart. But not all these things could fill the craving. Nature felt the tears on her own cheek, but could not understand, or speak. Nature was but a stepmother, and could not slake that thirst, nor did she once give to drink of her breasts for the quenching of that burning thirst. Nowhere can it find content.

Finally, when all has failed, when the armor is broken piece by piece and falls from the soul and it is smitten and utterly defenceless, the soul that seemed sleeping, awakes. It finds that in its sleep it has been stripped. In the rash strength of its youth, it pulled down the pillars of life in time. It stood amid the dust of its years heaped up as a mound, all begrimed with smears.

Its youth lies dead under that heap, the days of life seem to have caught fire as chips, and crackled and gone up in smoke, and seemed to puff up and burst, as the sunlight flashes on rippling water.

And now even the dream is gone from the dreamer, and the lute no more gives music for the lute-player.

Even the thoughts of poesy that seemed to make the earth an enchanted toy are fading away; they were not strong enough cords for the earth, and are overtaxed by grief.

All is so full of sadness, and sorrow, and grief, and failure to the heart seeking for love.

Ah! is this His love? Is it an immortal weed that will let no flowers spring up but its own?

Must Thou, O infinite designer, char the wood before Thou wilt draw any design with it?

Ah! must—

Designer infinite!

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

This is what puzzles the world.

Must Thou char the wood?

Must the soul and life be burnt in bitter suffering, a complete holocaust—before Thou canst limn with it?

Before God can draw, in the infinite design of His Providence, and work with the soul as a fit instrument, it must be charred in the furnace of suffering.

Upon the soul must be carved the image of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

In the Christian life must be reproduced the crucified.

The pride of human life must be charred by humiliation deep and bitter.

The sensuality of man must be burnt to a charred stick

by physical pain, intense suffering, denial of the senses, absolute.

The uncontrolled affections of the human heart must be bridled, subdued, conquered, and before Divine Love can use that heart, all merely human dross must be burnt away, and the heart purified of all earthly desire.

Ah! must—

Must Thou, Designer infinite, char the wood, before Thou canst limn with it?

It is the history of the dealings of God with the human soul.

All pride, sensuality, inordinate affection must be burnt out of the heart before God works with it on His design. And until that is done, after the soul there comes the beat of insistent feet, and a voice more instant than the beat.

Deny thyself, leave all and follow Me.

And the voice will never cease till the soul gives up all it loves, absolutely all, even though it persists in struggling to hold, and yields nothing until forced by that voice around it like a bursting sea, "Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."—

"The cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee.

Thou canst not escape it whithersoever thou runnest; for whithersoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee, and shalt always find thyself.

Turn thyself upwards. or turn thyself downwards; turn thyself without or turn thyself within thee, and everywhere thou wilt find the cross.

Prepare thyself to suffer many adversities, and divers evils, in this miserable life." (*Imitation of Christ*, I. C., 12.)

My freshness has fallen down as a shower in the dust, my heart is like a broken fountain, filled with stagnant

tears that drop from the moist-heavy thoughts, from the sad branches of my mind.

If the inside of the fruit is so bitter, how will the rind taste? I dimly guess at what is seen confusedly through the mists of Time. Yet at times I hear a trumpet from Eternity, I catch a glimpse of those everlasting battlements, for a moment I see them through the half-clearing mists that settle thick again and dim the view. But not before I have seen him who calls, wrapped in his purple robes of gloom and crowned with cypress. I know death, and the meaning of his trumpet that calls an end to all in life.

For the harvest field, whether it is of man's life or man's heart, must be dunged with death before they yield Him a harvest.

Life, before its harvest is given to the Divine Harvester must meet with death; so too, the harvest of the human heart must meet with the death of all it loves, must die to self before it gives the harvest to the harvester of love.

The noise of the long pursuit is at hand, and that Voice is around me like a bursting sea.

Is that earth which thou didst so love, now so utterly spoiled that it lies like a broken jar in pieces on the ground? Lo! all things fly thee, for thou fliest me.

O strange, pitiful object, so helpless. Why should it thus think that anything should love thee? No one but I loves such a wretched thing as thou art.

There should be some merit to deserve human love.

What hast thou done to merit? Thou, the most dingy clot of all mortal-clotted clay.

Alas, thou dost not know how little worthy thou art of any love. Thou art so ignoble, whom wilt thou find to love thee, but Me? Whatever I took from thee, I did not take to harm thee by the loss, but that thou mightst look

for it in my arms. By a child's mistake, what thou didst imagine was lost, I have kept all stored for thee at home.—

Rise, clasp my hand and come. That footstep is beside me.—

Is it true that what I thought was my gloom, was only the shadow of His hand outstretched to caress me?

I hear him say to me now, and oh, how true it is!

Ah! fondest, blindest, weakest, I am He whom thou seekest. Thou dravest love from Thee, who dravest Me.

## SEPARATE TOPICS.

### *The Soul pursued by God.*

The soul flees from Him—nights, days, years—in wandering of thought, in tears and laughter, in hopes and fears—

Those feet—follow—and a Voice

More instant than the feet

“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

### *The love of creatures.*

They elude him, evade him, are not true to him, for he is not true to God. “*Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter me.*”

### *The love of children.*

When their love seems to answer, their angels pluck them from him by the hair.

### *The love of nature.*

Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drought.

“*Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not me.*”

Shorn of armor—defenceless—asleep—awake, my mangled youth lies dead.

My days have gone up in smoke.

Puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

The dream fails the dreamer, the lute the lutanist.

The soul sought human love,—and though I knew His love who followed, yet I was sore adread, lest having Him, I must have naught beside.

The soul knows His love—and knows it is a jealous love, and is afraid that if it accepts that love and answers it as it should be answered, there could be no room for any creature.

And flying from that love, every human love was dis-

loyal, false—false to the love that was false to God—true to God and in its trueness to God—untrue to the love untrue to God.

And the children just as their love answers—their angel plucked them by the hair.

Come, then, ye other children—Nature's—share with me your delicate fellowship.

I drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.

Knew the importings of the wilful face of skies.

How clouds arise—from the foam of the wild sea snortings.

Knew all that's born or dies.

I was heavy with the even.

When she lit her glimmering tapers.

Round the day's dead sanctities.

I laughed in the morning's eyes.

I triumphed and I saddened in all weather.

But Ah! We know not what each other says.

In sound I speak—they speak in silences.

Whether man's heart or life it be which yields Thee harvest—must thy harvest fields be dunged with rotten death.

Now after that long pursuit comes a noise.

That Voice is round me like the bursting sea.

“And is thy earth so marred  
Shattered in shard on shard.”

*Lo all things fly Thee, for thou fliest me.*

*Wherefore should any set thee love apart?*

*Seeing none, but I make much of naught.*

*“How little worthy of any love thou art.”*

*“Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee, save Me—  
save only Me?”*

All which I took for thee I did but take not for thy  
harms.

But just that thou mightest seek it in my arms.

All that thou didst fancy lost, I have stored for thee  
at home.

Rise, clasp my hand and come.

Halts by me, that footfall,

Is my gloom after all

Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly,

*Ah! fondest, blindest, weakest,*

*I am He whom thou seekest,*

*Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."*

My yotee is  
sweet & tender night.

## MYSTICAL APPLICATION.

### I.

#### THE SOUL FLEES FROM GOD.

The soul flees from God by the love of creatures, by sin, by self-love, by turning from God, by refusing to listen to the inspirations of grace.

Turning away from God.

1. *"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."*  
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.
2. *"Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."*  
Children and nature.
3. *"Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me."*  
Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke.
4. *"Lo! all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me."*  
Strange, piteous, futile thing!
5. *"Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee, Save Me,  
Save only Me?"*  
All which I took from thee I did but take, not for  
thy harms.
6. *"Rise, clasp my hand, and come."*  
Halts by me, that footfall:
7. *"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
"I am He Whom thou seekest!"  
"Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."*

The soul seeks for happiness

In creatures.

In human sympathy.

In knowledge and study and science.

In nature.

All is failure.

It can find it only in God.

Without Whom all is emptiness.

The very unloveableness of all is to teach the loveableness of God.

He has recompense for all.

Only *He* loves—*He* only is worthy of being loved.

When the soul drives Him away it drives away happiness.

It turns from God—true happiness—to look for happiness in something that is not God.

It runs away from God—and God ever pursues the soul—yearning to win it back to true happiness, while it pursues false happiness.

This false happiness it looks for in creatures.

In human beings—in human sympathy and love.

In the love of little children.

In the love of nature.

In the love of knowledge—earth, sea and sky, the stars—in the seasons—they all speak not.

## MYSTICAL APPLICATION.

### II.

#### GOD PURSUES THE SOUL.

When the soul turns from God to love creatures inordinately instead of loving God, He places disappointment in the object loved, to make it turn back to God, who alone can satisfy the capacity of the soul. He follows and reproaches the disloyalty of the soul, and creatures are disloyal to it, at the time they seem loyal, with "traitorous trueness" and "loyal deceit."

God reproaches the soul, chides it, pleads with it.

Sends it many inspirations, by means of a word, a sermon, a line, a sorrow of life, a sickness, a suffering.

The soul finds all a failure—bitterness, with despondency and occasional glimpses of Eternity, and the thought of decay and death.

Then sounds a voice—like a bursting sea. The love that was sought is broken in pieces like a vessel of clay.

All things fail to answer the yearning for love of the human soul—which only God can fill.

Why should I find anything in thee to love, and yet I, only I, love thee—worthy of little love.

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee, save Me, save only Me?

"That which I took—thou'lt find it in my arms,

It's stored for thee at home, not lost.

Rise, clasp my hand and come."

"Halts by me that footfall

Is my gloom after all

Shade of His hand outstretched caressingly?

Ah! fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He whom thou seekest,  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.”

---

Francis Thompson wrote the Life of St. Ignatius and knew his ideas.

From the Poem we may draw a parallel with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius :

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

### I WEEK.

End of man, end of creatures,  
sin, hell, death.  
The soul turns from God by  
the wrong love of creatures.  
Chooses them instead of God.  
Repentance. Conversion of  
Soul to God.

### II WEEK.

Knowledge and Love of Our  
Lord. The Kingdom of  
Christ. The Incarnation.  
The Nativity. Hidden Life.  
Public Life. Two standards.  
Three classes of Men. Three  
Degrees of Humility.

### III WEEK.

The Passion of Christ.  
The Agony, the Scourging, the  
The Passion of Christ.  
Crowning with Thorns. Be-  
fore Pilate. The Death in  
shame on the Cross in the  
Crucifixion.

### IV WEEK.

The Resurrection.  
Contemplation on Divine Love.  
The creatures of God that

## POEM.

### I.

The soul fleeing from God to  
every creature.  
Resisting grace.  
Returning to God.  
Rise, clasp My hand and come.

### II.

Humility, surrender.  
Naked I wait Thy love's up-  
lifted stroke. My mangled  
youth lies dead beneath the  
heap. How little worthy of  
any love thou art. Whom  
wilt thou find to love ignoble  
thee save Me, save only Me?

### III.

The Mystery of Suffering.  
Is Thy love indeed a weed, an  
amaranthine weed?  
Ah! designer infinite.  
Oh! must Thou char the wood  
before Thou burn with it.  
Desolation of soul, sorrow,  
humiliation. Self Sacrifice  
with Christ Crucified.

### IV.

Rise, clasp My hand and come.  
All which thy child's mistake

were means before, are now as gifts from God to the soul. The creatures of God which He has made, lives in, operates in, for man, are broken reflections of the Divine beauty.

#### I WEEK.

In the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius the soul meditates on Man and the end for which he and other creatures were made, God. He can find happiness in God alone. He turns from God to creatures, and loves them for themselves, instead of as means to help him to God. This is sin. Sin turns man from God, and leads him to love creatures instead of God. He meditates on the evil of sin which separates the soul from God and casts it into hell. Knowing the evil and malice of sin, the soul turns back to God. God in His mercy pardons the repentant sinner and receives him back to His friendship and His love.

#### II WEEK.

In the Spiritual Exercises the soul listens to the Voice of the King in the Kingdom of Christ, who calls His noble followers about Him—asking them to make themselves remarkable in the service of their King. None but a cowardly

fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home.

Is my gloom after all shade of His hand outstretched carelessly? Thou dravest Love from thee, when thou dravest Me.

#### I.

In the poem by Francis Thompson the soul turns away from God, and strives to find its happiness in creatures, love, children, nature, knowledge, poetry—it finds that all things betray it who betrays God,—naught contents it, who contents not God.—It can find a return of love in no creature—not in man—nor in children, nor in nature—until stripped of all, it turns to God.—In Him alone it can find what it seeks.—Yet God loves it—unworthy of love.—Only God loves the soul—who had driven away His love.

#### II.

In the Poem the thought responding to the Second Week of the Exercises is the virtue of humility, and the surrender of self as the result of failure to find love in creatures to satisfy the yearnings of a soul meant for God. The soul is sought

knight would refuse such a call.

None but a cowardly soul would refuse to follow his kingly leader Christ.

He must follow him, and prove his love by imitating Christ

In the humility of the Incarnation,

In the poverty of the Nativity at Bethlehem,

In the obscurity of the Hidden Life at Nazareth,

In the toil of the Public Life in Judea.

If we wish to be like Christ we must learn from Him and His example the virtues of humility, poverty of spirit, the retirement of the Hidden Life and the incessant toil of the Public Life. We must do good not only for ourselves, but for others and for the glory of God.

### III WEEK.

The Third Week is given to the Meditations on the Passion, sufferings and death of Christ. After the Supper at Bethany and the institution of the Eucharist, the follower of Christ fed by the bread of Angels, must go with his King in the way of suffering. He will share in the anguish of His Divine Heart—in the Agony in the Garden, he will feel the bitter pangs of His Sacred Body—in the scourging by the soldiers;

for by God, kept from finding rest in creatures by their incapacity to respond to the yearning of the soul whose happiness can be filled by God alone.

So it must not seek that which gratifies pride, and gives glory to self instead of to God, by fame and reputation, nor rest, nor leisure in the mere enjoyment of the things of the earth, but make all things a means of bringing the soul closer to its Lord and Master. So there must be humility and surrender of self to God. "I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke."

### III.

Ah! Designer Infinite, must thou char the wood before thou canst limn with it?

For the soul to be made an instrument of the Infinite Designer it must be tried in the fire of suffering until it is charred, and its self-love and imperfections removed by pain. Why should it be so? The Infinite Designer has so ordained. He has given the example of suffering. "He was wounded for our iniquities, and by His

he will know the pangs of His Divine mind in the cruel crowning of thorns, and will taste the full bitterness of the holocaust of suffering on the road to Calvary and in the three hours on the cross, and the death of the Crucified.

The soul penetrates the depths of Divine suffering and learns that to be like the Lord it, too, must share the bitterness of the sufferings of the Master.

bruises we are healed." But we must apply His sufferings to our own souls. He merited, but we must individually apply His merit. It would be easier for Him to bear all, and for us to bear none, but He has borne more, we must bear, at least, some suffering. He gave the greatest proof of love. He laid down His life for His friend. He was not obliged to do so, His love constrained Him. Shall we be so unselfish as not to wish to suffer something for Him who suffered so much for us. He gave up all for us. Love dictates that we should give up all for Him, even were it not necessary. The proof of our love will be our likeness to our Crucified Lord.

Ah! Designer Infinite, must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

#### IV WEEK.

The spirit of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises is joy with our Risen Lord. Gladness and happiness at His Resurrection are to be the keynote of all our thoughts. We are rejoicing because He our Master and King who suffered pain and died, now suffers no more, but has risen to life by His own power to die no more. He will receive in His Sacred Humanity the reward of all His sufferings and

#### IV.

"Rise, clasp my hand, and come." The despondency and gloom brought on by the failure of creatures to respond to the seeking for happiness, by the failure of everything in life to bring content and happiness, now gives way to the consoing thought:

"I, your God, am near. You thought all things were lost, but I have kept them stored up for you at home." The gloom that seemed to darken each joy and

merits. We rejoice, also, because by His resurrection we are assured of our resurrection from the dead, and freedom from sin, pain and sorrow forevermore. The creatures which God gave as means are now gifts of His goodness to us, reflections of His Divine Beauty. Where we made sacrifices for His love, He has given us a hundredfold in return and life eternal.

to take away all happiness in life, was it after all the shade of His hand caressing me? Is it not now all brightened by the joy and glory of the love that has come? The love that I drove away, when I drove my Lord away, I drove Love from me, when I drove Him. Ah! Love Divine. Stay with me forevermore to be my joy. Now that I know Thee, Divine Love, shall I ever drive this Love from me? May it not be said of me "Thou drivest Love from thee when thou drivest Me."

## TOPICS FOR STUDY.

In this poem we may consider separately  
The Thought.  
The mystical thought.  
The diction.  
The imagery.  
The wonderfully expressive words.  
The vistas of thought opened up.  
The soundness of the views of life.  
The solidity of the doctrine.  
The depths of divine love sounded.  
The compassion of divine mercy portrayed.  
The contrast of finite and infinite flashed forth.  
The gentleness of Divine Providence in life's sorrows.  
The recompense to the soul that turneth back to God.  
The insight into the Spiritual Life.  
The knowledge of the human heart.  
The emptiness of all save God.  
The subterfuges of the heart in evading God's love.  
The futility of the flight of the soul from God.

## SELECTED WORDS—THOUGHTS—IDEAS.

Down the arches of the years.  
I hid from Him in the mist of tears and under running  
laughter.  
Vistaed hopes.  
Shot adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears.  
Unperturbèd pace, majestic instancy, deliberate speed.  
Hearted casement.  
Trellised with intertwining charities.

The margent of the world.  
Gold gateways of the stars.  
Fretted to dulcet jars.  
And silvern chatter.  
The pale ports of the moon.

Young skyey blossoms.  
Tremendous lover.  
Traitorous trueness.  
Loyal deceit.

Whistling mane of every wind.  
Long savannahs of the blue.  
Thunder driven  
Clanged His chariot 'thwart a heaven.  
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn of their  
feet.

Plucked them from me by the hair.  
Delicate fellowship.  
Wind-walled palace.

Azured daïs.  
Taintless way is.  
Lucent weeping.

Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.  
Swift importings in the wilful face of skies.  
Knew how the clouds arise, spumèd of the wild sea  
snortings.  
Shapers of mine own words.  
With them joyed and was bereaven.

The day's dead sanctities.  
I laughed in the morning's eyes.  
Heaven and I wept together.  
Its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine.  
Red throb of its sunset heart.  
My tears were hot on Heaven's grey cheek.  
Their sound is but their stir.  
They speak by silences.

Blue bosom veil of sky.  
I shook the pillaring hours.  
Pulled my life upon me.  
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke.  
Puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

Now fails the dream the dreamer,  
And the lute the lutanist.  
Blossomy twist.

I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist.  
With heavy griefs so overplussed.  
An amaranthine weed.  
Designer infinite.

Must thou char the wood to limn with it?  
My freshness spent its wavering shower in the dust,  
where tear-drippings stagnate.  
Dank thoughts that shiver upon the sighful branches  
of the mind.  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle.  
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again.  
With glooming robes.

Must thy harvest fields be dunged with rotten death?  
That voice is round me like a bursting sea.  
Shattered in shard on shard.  
Seeing none but I make much of naught.  
Of all man's clotted clay, the dingiest clot.  
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee, save Me, save  
only Me?

I did but take, not for thy harms.  
Is my gloom after all, shade of His hand outstretched  
caressingly?  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.

## EXPRESSIVE WORDS.

- Amaranth—Purple flower. *Immortal weed*.  
Amaranthine—Immortal, unfading.  
Bruit—noise.  
Casement—window.  
Clotted clay—clay in clots with moisture.  
Dank—moist, heavy.  
Dulcet jars—Sweet discords.  
Fret—High notes held down on stringed instruments,  
guitar, etc.  
Fret—Means to tease, also to strike metal into shapes  
and bars.  
Fretted to dulcet jars.  
Instancy—urgent pressure.  
Limn—paint, draw.  
Margent—border.  
Owe—own.  
Pulp—inside.  
Rind—shell.  
Savannahs—meadows, low, level, treeless plains.  
Shard—piece of broken pottery.  
Sun-starts—water flashing in the sunlight.  
Wantoning—playing.  
Wash—rise against, like the tide waters.  
Wist—to know, wit.

In his article on Francis Thompson, Albert Cock says:

"Who, knowing the 'Hound of Heaven,' will assert that the Catholic Church no longer voices the spiritual yearnings of the age? . . . Francis Thompson is, in some respects, the greatest achievement of Catholicism in the nineteenth century. His poetry is resident in man. It is the repetition of the centuries."

And he continues:

"No wonder this moved the literary world to enthusiasm. It has been said that people will be learning it by heart two centuries hence. In truth its qualities hardly need analyzing. Many are the odes in our language which drag out a weary length and lack an inevitable finish, but not of this can it be said:

Time is. Our tedious song should here have ending.

For immediacy of appeal and perfect conformity of soul with Force, it has no superior; in its astounding speed of phrase it reaches a new goal in our literature; its subtle and intricate rhymes are the secret rivets which bind together a poem unique in the singleness and greatness of its theme; as a religious poem it stands for all the world and for all time, and, by a right royal of its own claims peerage with the Psalmist for range, with St. Paul for virility of argument and with St. Augustine for greatness of thought and diction."

# A STUDY OF FRANCIS THOMPSON'S HOUND OF HEAVEN

—BY—

REV. J. F. X. O'CONOR, S.J.

◆  
*Dedicated with permission to His Eminence Cardinal Farley*  
◆

Father O'Connor's "Study of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven" contains the complete poem, an interpretation, a mystical application, and a parallel with one of the greatest masterpieces of religious thought, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

## SOME OPINIONS

"It has reached the Fourth Edition in five months."

"This remarkably interesting book may be ordered now from the leading publishers."

"It contains an estimate and an appreciation of the most remarkable poem of the century, full of strength, sweetness and light. There is given a mystical application and a parallel between it and the Exercises of St. Ignatius."

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"Fr. O'Connor has strung another pearl on the gleaming carcanet of Catholic Belles-Lettres."

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"I went through the 'Study of the Hound of Heaven' most carefully. It is very, very fine. A great many are anxious to read it. A copy should be in every English institution."

"Some will not read the poem because of the name."

"Of this poet Chesterton says: 'You can work infinitely in, and infinitely out.' Room for analysis there."

"I have received the 'Study of the Hound of Heaven.' On reading the poem I did not seem to appreciate it, but as I finished the Study it seemed as if I had been in a dark cathedral looking at a painting when the window opened and shed a flood of light, bringing out the glorious beauty of the picture in all its splendid color and detail."

"Immediacy of success has greeted Father O'Connor's 'Study of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven.'"

"Its first limited edition was rapidly exhausted. Everyone wants to read it. It has been welcomed by the general reader and the scholar, the lover of the spiritual and of the literary, by the religious and the layman."

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"Evidently John Lane must realize the value and charm of the 'Study of the Hound of Heaven,' and I am elated that you have moulded it so beautifully."

"I was not familiar with the poem and at first it really awed me. Each time one reads it it becomes more wonderful and beautiful, but I am afraid without your brilliant interpretation others besides myself would have lost its full meaning. You have certainly made it very clear to comprehend."

"You have opened up vistas through the richness of Thompson's thought that will enable many minds to enjoy beauties that would have remained otherwise hidden but to the few."

"I hope the little work will fall into many hands; it has a real mission in the material world of to-day, as it opens the way to all that is most spiritual and highest."

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Very sincerely yours,

WILLIAM CARD. O'CONNELL,  
*Abp. Boston.*

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"I have read with interest and pleasure your 'Study of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven,' and I congratulate you on the service which you have done to all readers of the greatest poem of modern times."

Yours sincerely,

✠REGIS CANEVIN.

"You can hardly imagine how thankful I am for your 'Study' of Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven.' It has revealed the hidden beauty of the poem."

Very faithfully yours,

✠JAMES A. McFAUL,

*Bp. of Trenton.*

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New York:

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